1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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In 1920 large-scale military operations, including bombing and machine-gunning of camps, were conducted against the Eastern Jikany and caused much loss of life and destruction of property. There were further patrols from time to time, but the Nuer remained unsubdued. In 1927 the Nuong tribe killed their District Commissioner, while at the same time the Lou openly defied the Government and the Gaawar attacked Duk Faiyuil Police Post. From 1928 to 1930 prolonged operations were conducted against the whole of the disturbed area and marked the end of serious fighting between the Nuer and the Government. Conquest was a severe blow to the Nuer, who had for so long raided their neighbours with impunity and whose country had generally remained intact.

X

In our account of Nuer time-reckoning we noted that in one department of time their system of reckoning is, in a broad sense, a conceptualization, in terms of activities, or of physical changes that provide convenient points of reference for activities, of those phases of the oecological rhythm which have peculiar significance for them. We further noted that in another department of time it is a conceptualization of structural relations, time units being co-ordinate with units of structural space. We have given a brief description of these units of structural space in its political, or territorial, dimension and have drawn attention to the influence of oecology on distribution and hence on the values given to the distribution, the interrelation between which is the political system. This system is not, however, as simple as we have presented it, for values are not simple, and we now attempt to face some of the difficulties we have so far neglected. We start this attempt by asking what it is the Nuer mean when they speak of their *cieng*.

Values are embodied in words through which they influence behaviour. When a Nuer speaks of his *cieng*, his *dhor*, his *gol*, &c., he is conceptualizing his feelings of structural distance, identifying himself with a local community, and, by so doing, cutting himself off from other communities of the same kind. An examination of the word *cieng* will teach us one of the most fundamental characteristics of Nuer local groups and, indeed, of all social groups: their structural relativity.

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•196 What does a Nuer mean when he says, 'I am a man of such-and-such a *cieng*'? *Cieng* means 'home', but its precise significance varies with the situation in which it is spoken. If one meets an Englishman in Germany and asks him where his home is, he may reply that it is England. If one meets the same man in London and asks him the same question he will tell one that his home is in Oxfordshire, whereas if one meets him in that county he will tell one the name of the town or village in which he lives. If questioned in his town or village he will mention his particular street, and if questioned in his street he will indicate his house. So it is with the Nuer. A Nuer met outside Nuerland says that his home is *cieng Nath*, Nuerland. He may also refer to his tribal country as his *cieng*, though the more usual expression for this is *rol*. If one asks him in his tribe what is his *cieng*, he will name his village or tribal section according to the context. Generally he will name either his tertiary tribal section or his village, but he may give his primary or secondary section. If asked in his village he will mention the name of his hamlet or indicate his homestead or the end of the village in which his homestead is situated. Hence if a man says '*Wa ciengda*', 'I am going home', outside his village he means that he is returning to it; if in his village he means that he is going to his hamlet; if in his hamlet he means that he is going to his homestead. *Cieng* thus means homestead, hamlet, village, and tribal sections of various dimensions.

The variations in the meaning of the word *cieng* are not due to the inconsistencies of language, but to the relativity of the group-values to which it refers. I emphasize this character of structural distance at an early stage because an understanding of it is necessary to follow the account of various social groups which we are about to describe. Once it is understood, the apparent contradictions in our account will be seen to be contradictions in the structure itself, being, in fact, a quality of it. The argument is here introduced in its application to local communities, which are treated more fully in the next chapter, and its application to lineages and age-sets is postponed to Chapters V and VI.

829 A man is a member of a political group of any kind in virtue of his non-membership of other groups of the same kind. He sees them as groups and their members see him as a member of a group, and his relations with them are controlled by the structural distance between the groups concerned. But a man

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generally manned by a man and his brothers or married sons, with a common kraal or contiguous kraals. Up till the present I have refrained as far as possible from the use of Nuer words when referring to their political and territorial segments. Especially have I avoided the term *cieng* (*shieng*), which has been the source of much confusion. I will now speak briefly of these native terms and explain their meanings, as far as my knowlege of the Nuer language goes, in relation to the ethnological expressions I have employed in this essay.

The word *cieng* means "home." When you ask a Nuer where is his home, you ask him what is his *cieng*. Hence the word may have a large number of different meanings which vary with the situations in which it is spoken. If you meet an Englishman in Germany and you ask him where is his home, he will reply that his home is in England. If you meet him in London and ask him the same question he will tell you that his home is in Oxfordshire, whereas if you meet him in that county he will tell you the name of the town or village in which he lives. If you ask him where is his home in the town or village where he lives he will mention a particular street or house. So it is with the Nuer. If you meet a Nuer outside Nuerland he will tell you that he comes from *cieng Nath* (Nuerland, the home of the Nuer). If you meet him east of the Nile he may tell you that he comes from *Nath cieng* (the homeland Nuer, or the Nuer who live to the west of the Nile, in contrast to the *Nath doar* (Bush Nuer), or the Nuer to the east of the Nile). These are, however, particular uses of the word *cieng*, which usually refers to much smaller territorial units. I cannot recollect a Nuer speaking of his country (tribal area) as a *cieng*, though I see no reason why he should not do so. Normally he calls his country his *rol*. It is of the tribal sections that he uses the word *cieng*, and if you ask him where is his *cieng* he presumes you want to know the name of his village or district. Hence he tells you the name of the village where he lives, e.g., *cieng* Minyääl (Jekany) or *cieng* Dumien (Lou) or *cieng* Pakur (Lek), the villages of Minyääl or Dumien or Pakur, or he may mention under the same term larger districts such as *cieng* Leng or *cieng* Wangkeac, the districts of Leng and Wangkeac. In different contexts he may speak of even larger areas as *cieng*, e.g., the tertiary tribal section of Gaatbal as *cieng* Gaatbal (Lou). On the other hand he may use *cieng* when speaking of smaller units than the village, such as the hamlet and

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homestead. *Ciengda* (my home), in the singular, generally means "my homestead" where I live with my family, whereas *ciengdan* (our home) means usually "our hamlet" or "our village." Thus a man will say "*wa ciengdan*" ("I am going (to our) home") in reference to his village, such as the village of Pakur (Lek), but if he is already in the village of Pakur and says "*wa ciengdan*" ("I am going (to our) home") he means that he is returning to the hamlet where he and his relatives live in a particular section of the village. If he is in the hamlet and says "*wa ciengda*" ("I am going (to my) home") he means that he is going to his hut or cattle byre. I remember making a mistake in this way when I used to say "*wa ciengdan*," meaning that I was off to my tent, for which the Nuer would good-humouredly rebuke me, saying, "Isn't this, our camp, your home?" whereas when I said "*wa ciengda*," in the singular, it passed without the criticism which the Nuer unfailingly bring to bear on any error in grammar or pronunciation. *Cieng* thus means homestead, village, district, tribal sections, homeland and even "home" in an unspecified sense, e.g., it may be said in a story *nyaang ce wa cieng* (the crocodile went home) or *jicieng* (villagers), etc., etc.; for this reason I use the word as little as possible.

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There is a further reason for avoiding its use, and though I shall have occasion when speaking of the Nuer clan system to mention it more fully I will refer to it in this place. The *cieng*, in the sense of homestead, is called after the man who lives there, e.g., the homestead occupied by Rainen is called *cieng* Rainen. When Rainen is dead and his sons and nephews live together in a hamlet they will call the hamlet after him and it will be said that they live in *cieng* Rainen. If Rainen was an important enough man and founded a strong enough lineage, the whole village where his descendants and strangers who have intermarried with them live will then become known as *cieng* Rainen. In course of time his descendants will have multiplied and will occupy a district or a large tribal area which will come to be known as *cieng* Rainen. Hence it comes about that many of the tribal sections I have mentioned as examples for the use of *cieng* are called after persons, e.g., Minyäal, Dumien, Wangkeac, Gaatbal. As will be explained more clearly later a lineage thus becomes identified in speech with the territory which it occupies—the district occupied by the major lineage of WANGKEAC, for example, being known as *cieng* Wangkeac. The Nuer then talks

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about the district and the lineage which lives there as interchangeable terms and speaks of *cieng* WANGKEAC in the sense of the WANGKEAC lineage. This leads a European into depths of confusion since the WANGKEAC lineage and the people who live in the village of Wangkeac are by no means the same thing. I shall have occasion to plumb these depths of confusion, into which I have myself been long plunged, in the following sections.

Cieng, in the singular, e.g., ciengda (my homestead), is the same as *gol* in the singular, e.g., *golla* (my homestead), and *cieng* in the plural, e.g., *ciengdan* (our hamlet), which means the same as *gol* in the plural, e.g., *gollan* (our hamlet). The literal meaning of *gol* is the large dung fire which occupies the centre of every cattle byre. During the wet season this is kept continually alight and serves to keep mosquitoes away from the cattle and the young men who sleep on a platform above it, while during the daytime people sit around it and chat. In the dry season the *gol* is a huge heap of ashes enclosed by a windscreen and around it sleep the inmates of the windscreen and there also they spend a large part of the day watching their cattle, drinking milk, sleeping and smoking. This dung fire signifies the home and especially symbolises the household from the point of view of its male occupants since women have their own cooking fires. *Jigoalla* (the people of my *gol*) are the people of my household, especially the menfolk of my household. *Gol* Cam or *gol* Pec is the homestead or windscreen of Cam or Pec and hence means the household of Cam or Pec. *Ran gol* Cam is a member of Cam's household and *jigoal* Pec is the household of Pec, i.e., the people who habitually live in his homestead and make use of his cattle byre.

The only other Nuer word I will draw attention to in this place is *dor*. I think that the most comprehensive meaning of *dor* is what is not actual homestead. The word generally means " bush " in contrast to *cieng* (home), e.g., " *wa dor* " (" I am going into the bush " almost " I am going out ") is the opposite to " *wa cieng* " (" I am going home "). Different parts of the bush can be designated by some conspicuous landmark as the *dor* of such and such a thing. The word is noticed in this place because it is often used to refer to the unoccupied land lying around a homestead or hamlet which is used for sowing maize or on which goats and sheep and calves graze. In this sense *doran* (our dor) has much the same meaning as *ciengdan* (our *cieng*), though the former word seems

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823 196 rather more inclusive. But both are used to refer to " our home," " our hamlet," "our village." Thus Pakur (Lek tribe) village is divided up into a number of hamlets, and one may speak of each hamlet with the unoccupied land around it which divides it off from neighbouring hamlets as a *dor* and designate it by some landmark, e.g., *dor ngop* (the part of the village which lies near the *gameiza* (fig-tree)), *dor wich kwer* (the part of the village which lies around a sandy eminence) and *dor thok ruop* (the part of the village which borders the forest). As we have already noticed, such territorial expressions become identified with the people who occupy the territory, so in this case we may speak of CUOL *ngop* and CUOL *wich kwer*, the section of the CUOL lineage who live near the *Gameiza* tree and the section of the CUOL lineage who live near the sandy eminence.

I mention these three Nuer words, *cieng*, *gol*, and *dor*, because they are so frequently heard on Nuer lips and to explain that my reason for using them so seldom in the text is that they refer to so many different things according to the context in which they are spoken.

III.

621 I have spoken of the clan as forming the iron girders upon which the political structure of the tribe is built up; I have spoken of each tribe having a dominant element within it; I have mentioned that the territorial groups of Nuer country integrate themselves around a kinship nucleus and that their cohesion depends upon this nucleus as much as upon communal life or locality; I have remarked that as the ties of kinship become more and more distantly stretched they weaken and that they weaken also by the dilution of kinship with other elements and that both these processes are reflected in the manner in which tribal groups segment. These assertions need explanation. It is very difficult to analyse Nuer society without repetition because when we speak of the tribe we are also speaking of political aggregates which crystallise around some clans. Yet it is imperative to keep these two groups, the tribe and the clan, distinct if endless confusion is to be avoided. Much of the confusion of Jackson's account is due to the fact that he did not clearly differentiate between them.

619 361 614 Herein lies a great difficulty. The Nuer tribe always has a name derived from the name of the country which it occupies, e.g., one may

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614 as you can ask a Zande, for example, "*Ngbwatungaro nga da?*" You
[196] get at his clan by degrees, if you get at it at all, by asking a man what is his *thok mac* or *thok dwiel* (the hearth of his fire or the entrance to his hut). In my experience the latter expression is the more common and I will use it here. The reader will observe that it is analogous in its literal and extended meanings to the Arabic *khashm el bet*. A man's *thok dwiel* are all those persons of either sex who can trace their descent through males exclusively to a common ancestor. *Thok dwiel* is, therefore, a relative term since its extension depends on the particular person who is selected as the point of departure. Thus if we begin with the father then the *thok dwiel* will include only sons and daughters, but if we take the grandfather as our point of departure it will include all his sons and daughters and the children of his sons. A larger and larger number of agnates (persons related through the male line exclusively) will be included in the term *thok dwiel* the higher up the line of ascent we take the point of departure. Now the Nuer does not generally, if ever, refer to the group of father and children as a *thok dwiel*. These people, together with the mothers, form so obviously a family and household (*gol*). *Thok dwiel* of a man means essentially his father's kinsman and the only question is how far back the Nuer goes up the line of ascent before he hits on an ancestor whose descendants in the male line he includes in his notion of kin. The answer to this question is complicated since there is no invariable rule in the matter and since the notion of kin is relative, more people being included in some contexts than in others by the same speaker.

613 Thus in diagram No. IV W, X, Y, and Z are four sons of S and they sleep in their father's kraal and form part of his family and household (*gol*). Many years later we return to their country and we find that S is long since dead and that his sons, W, X, Y, and Z, have each a family of their own. We may now speak of W, X, Y, and Z, with their sons and daughters as forming a *thok dwiel*, which would be called after S, their common ascendant. In the terminology employed in this paper we would speak of the lineage of S since we are using the term lineage to denote the unilateral group of agnatic kin which the Nuer calls his *thok dwiel*. If you ask any member of this line of descent from S what is his lineage, he will reply that he belongs to the house (*cieng*) of S. Here again it is necessary to re-emphasise that in saying that he belongs

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CHAPTER I

GOD

I

THE Nuer word we translate 'God' is *kwoth*,[1] Spirit. Nuer also speak of him more definitely as *kwoth nhial* or *kwoth a nhial*, Spirit of the sky or Spirit who is in the sky. There are other and lesser spirits which they class as *kuth nhial*, spirits of the sky or of the above, and *kuth piny*, spirits of the earth or of the below. I discuss the conception of God first because the other spiritual conceptions are dependent on it and can only be understood in relation to it.

The Nuer *kwoth*, like the Latin *spiritus*, the Greek *pneuma*, and the English derivatives of both words, suggests both the intangible quality of air and the breathing or blowing out of air. Like the Hebrew *ruaḥ* it is an onomatope and denotes violent breathing out of air in contrast to ordinary breathing.[2] In its verbal form it is used to describe such actions as blowing on the embers of a fire; blowing on food to cool it; blowing into the uterus of a cow, while a tulchan is propped up before it, to make it give milk; snorting; the blowing out of air by the puff fish; and the hooting by steam pressure of a river steamer. The word is also found, and has the same general sense, in some of the other Nilotic languages.

As a noun, however, *kwoth* means only Spirit, and in the particular sense we are now discussing it means *kwoth nhial* or *kwoth a nhial*, Spirit of the heavens or Spirit who is in the heavens, the copula *a* in the second designation being one of the verbs we translate 'to be'. *Nhial* is the sky, and combined with verbs the word may also refer to certain natural processes associated with the sky, as raining and thundering; but it may also have merely the sense of 'on high' or 'above'. We may certainly say that the Nuer do not regard the sky or any celestial phenomenon as God, and this is clearly shown in the distinction made between God and

[1] The word has been variously spelt by European writers. I shall throughout use *kwoth* (pl. *kuth*), neglecting the genitive and locative forms.

[2] Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, 1944, chap. vii.

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*776 Before discussing further the separation of God from man I will mention some of the chief attributes of God. He is in the sky, but his being in the sky does not mean that he is not at the same time elsewhere, and on earth. Indeed, as will be seen, Nuer religious thought cannot be understood unless God's closeness to man is taken together with his separation from man, for its meaning lies precisely in this paradox.

Nuer say that God is everywhere, that he is 'like wind' and 'like air'. According to Father Crazzolara,[1] he may be spoken of by the epithets *jiom*, wind, and *ghau*, universe, but these words only [538] stand for God in poems or in an allegorical sense and are illustrations of the liking the Nilotic peoples show in their poetry for metonymy and synecdoche. God is not wind, but *cere jiom*, like wind; and he is not *ghau*, the universe, but *cak ghaua*, the creator of the universe. Another poetic epithet by which he may be referred to is *tutgar*. This is an ox-name, taken from an ox of the [231] kind Nuer call *wer*, which has wide spreading horns and is the most majestic of their beasts (Plate I). The name is a combination of two words: *tut*, which has the sense of 'strength' or 'greatness', and *gar*, which has the sense of 'omnipresent', as in another of God's titles, *kwoth me gargar*, the omnipresent God (*gargar* can also be translated 'limitless').[2] But the commonest Nuer way of trying to express their idea of the nature of God is to say that he is like wind or air, a metaphor which seems appropriate to us because it is found throughout the hierological literature of the world and we are particularly familiar with it in the Old Testament. Among the Nuer the metaphor is consistent not only with the absence of any fixed abode of God but also of any places where he is thought particularly to dwell, for air and wind are everywhere. Unlike the other spirits God has no prophets or sanctuaries or earthly forms.

*776 God, Spirit in the heavens who is like wind and air, is the
● 196 creator and mover of all things. Since he made the world he is addressed in prayers as *kwoth ghaua*, Spirit of the universe, with the sense of creator of the universe. The word *cak*, used as a noun, can mean the creation, that is, all created things, and hence the

[1] Op. cit. p. 72.

[2] Dr. Mary Smith tells me that if a ne'er-do-well is asked how he expects to live he may reply '*kwoth e gargar*', 'God is limitless' (in his power to aid), in the same way as a man may say of the earth or of the universe that it is *gargar*, limitless.

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nature or character proper to a person or thing; it can be used in a very special sense to refer to an abnormality, *cak kwoth*, a freak; and, though I think rarely, it is used as a title of God, the creator, as in the expression *cak nath*, creator of men. As a verb 'to create' it signifies creation *ex nihilo*, and when speaking of things can therefore only be used of God. However, the word can be used of men for imaginative constructions, such as the thinking of a name to give a child, inventing a tale, or composing a poem, in the same figurative sense as when we say that an actor creates a part. The word therefore means not only creation from nothing but also creation by thought or imagination, so that 'God created the universe' has the sense of 'God thought of the universe' or 'God imagined the universe'.

Professor Westermann wrote at the dictation of a Nuer an account of how God created the world and made all things in it. It begins *'Me chak koth nath, chwo ran thath'*, which he has translated 'When God created the people, he created man.'[1] It will be observed that he has translated two different words, *cak* (*chak*) and *tath* (*thath*), by 'create', but they have not quite the same sense, for whereas *cak* means creation *ex nihilo* and in thought or imagination, *tath* means to make something out of something else already materially existing, as when a child moulds clay into the shape of an ox or a smith beats a spear out of iron. The sentence would therefore be better translated 'When God created people then he made (or fashioned) man.' The distinction is similar to that between 'created' and 'made' in the first chapter of Genesis, 'created' there being a translation of the Hebrew *br'*, which can only be used for divine activity.

The complementary distinction made in Genesis between 'the heaven and the earth' is made, by implication at least, in a slightly different way by the Nuer. A parallelism often heard in their prayers is *'e piny du, e ghaudu'*, 'it is thine earth, it is thy universe'. *Piny* is the down-below, the earth in the sense of the terrestrial world as the Nuer know it. *Ghau* has many meanings—world, sky, earth, atmosphere, time, and weather—which taken together, as they should be in a context of prayer, mean the universe. Another common, and related, strophe in prayers is *'e ghaudu, e rwacdu'*, 'it is thy universe, it is thy word'. *Rwac* in ordinary

[1] Diedrich Westermann, 'The Nuer Language', *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, 1912, p. 115.

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776 contexts means speech, talk, or word, but when used in prayers
196 and invocations in the phrase *'e rwacdu'*, 'it is thy word', it means the will of God; and when used in reference to creation it has almost the meaning of the creative word: 'he created the world, it is his word'.

773 The Nuer can hardly be said to have a creation myth, though our authorities[1] record some fragmentary accounts of the creation of men, parts of which I have myself heard. These state that men were created in the Jagei country of western Nuerland at a certain tamarind tree, at the foot of which offerings, and according to Mr. Jackson sacrifices, were sometimes made till it was destroyed by [171] fire in 1918. Many details in the versions given by Mr. Jackson and Captain Fergusson are clearly foreign, either Dinka or in Mr. Jackson's account Shilluk and in Captain Fergusson's account possibly even Atwot or Mandari, and I regard Father Crazzolara's version as the closest to Nuer tradition. In this version the tamarind tree, called Lic, was itself the mother of men who, according to one account, emerged from a hole at its foot or, according to another account, dropped off its branches like ripe fruits.

776 Whether they are speaking about events which happened *ne*
761 *walka*, in the beginning or long ago, or about happenings of yesterday or today, God, creative Spirit, is the final Nuer explanation of everything. When asked how things began or how they have come to be what they are they answer that God made them or that it was his will that they have come to be what they are. The heavens and the earth and the waters on the earth, and the beasts and birds and reptiles and fish were made by him, and he is the author of custom and tradition. The Nuer herd cattle and cultivate millet and spear fish because God gave them these things for their sustenance. He instituted their marriage prohibitions. He gave ritual powers to some men and not to others. He decreed that the Nuer should raid the Dinka and that Europeans should conquer the Nuer. He made one man black and another white [826] (according to one account our white skins are a punishment by God for incest committed by our ancestor with his mother), one man fleet and another slow, one strong and another weak. Everything in nature, in culture, in society, and in men is as it is because

[1] H. C. Jackson, 'The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1923, pp. 70–71; V. H. Fergusson, 'The Nuong Nuer', ibid., 1921, pp. 148–9; J. P. Crazzolara, op. cit., p. 66.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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777 to dust and killed many of the 'Turks' as well because they had
x 776 compared the rifle he had given them to his power. The point of
773 this story is not merely that God was stronger than the 'Turks' but that he was in the right and the 'Turks' were at fault.

x 776 This brings me to an extremely important Nuer concept, an
577 understanding of which is very necessary to a correct appreciation
196 of their religious thought and practice. This is the concept of *cuong*. This word can mean 'upright' in the sense of standing, as, for example, in reference to the supports of byres. It is also used figuratively for 'firmly established', as in the phrase *'be gole cuong'*, 'may his hearth stand', which has the sense of *stet fortuna domus*. It is most commonly employed, however, with the meaning of 'in the right' in both a forensic and a moral sense. The discussion in what we would call legal cases is for the purpose of determining who has the *cuong*, the right, in the case, or who has the most right; and in any argument about conduct the issue is always whether a person has conformed to the accepted norms of social life, for, if he has, then he has *cuong*, he has right on his side. We are concerned with the concept here both because it relates directly to man's behaviour towards God and other spiritual beings and the ghosts and because it relates to God in a more indirect way, in that he is regarded as the founder and guardian of morality. Up to this point I have been describing Nuer ideas about the nature of God. I shall now describe their ideas about what God requires of them.

III

I do not want to suggest that God is thought to be an immediate sanction for all conduct, but I must emphasize that the Nuer are of one voice in saying that sooner or later and in one way or another good will follow right conduct and ill will follow wrong conduct. People may not reap their rewards for good acts and punishments for bad acts for a long time, but the consequences of both follow behind (*gwor*) them and in the end catch up on those responsible for them. You give milk to a man when he has no lactating cows, or meat and fish to him when he is hungry, or you befriend him in other ways, though he is no close kinsman of yours. He blesses you, saying that your age-mates will die while

is everything well with your home? A fifth question sometimes asked is *'ci bagh?'*, 'has it dawned (well for you)?' Not all these questions are always asked, but often two or three of them are, and sometimes more. In the full greeting we therefore get a composite picture of easy sleep and fresh awakening, contentment, prayer, and a smoking hearth, that is, of a person at peace in himself. 576

This digression was made to explain the meaning of the expression *'akonienko'* in prayer. The phrase is in harmony with some other expressions used in prayer: *'apwonyko pwol'*, 'may we be light', and *'apwonyko koc'*, 'may we be cool'. *Pwony* means 'body' or 'self' and here it means 'self' in the sense of the person as an entire person, body and soul. There is no reason why a Nuer should want to be light or cool in a purely physical sense. What is intended is to ask that the people may be light not only in the sense of physical well-being but also in the sense of *pwol koc*, of being light-hearted or joyful, free from burdens and troubles; and that they may be cool in the sense of not being anxious or worried, cool in the sense of calm. This is shown by a variant which is one of the commonest Nuer prayers, *'a yiegh neni koc'*, which can in this context only be translated 'may the souls of the people be cool', though in other contexts *yiegh* can mean 'breath' or 'life'. Very often the word *thei* is added, *'a yiegh neni koce thei'*, and this gives an emphasis: 'may the souls of the people be very cool'. Obviously Nuer are not asking, unless it be metaphorically, that their breath or life may be very cold. The word *koc* is also used in expressions of good will towards persons, especially in the blessing *'apwonydu koc'*, 'may you be cool', that is, 'may you be at peace'.[1] 782 196

The word *koc* can also mean 'soft' or 'tender', and though it is best translated 'cool' in prayers the two meanings may blend. Here again, Nuer clearly do not want to be physically soft. Indeed the expression *'koce thei'* in the physical sense of softness means when applied to men 'to be completely impotent sexually'. The idea of softness is seen in the metaphor often heard in prayers and invocations: 'may we tread on wild rice'. *Poon*, wild rice, is, Nuer say, the softest of grasses to the feet, as it is also one of the 782 196 137

[1] The symbolism can at once be appreciated by ourselves, especially by those acquainted with the Vulgate and other Latin sacred texts where *refrigerium*, a cooling, is used in the tropical senses of 'consolation', 'mitigation', 'refreshing', and 'comfort'.

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tenderest pasture grasses, being sometimes gathered to feed small calves by hand. Nuer speak of life as walking through pastures and they ask for a path that has no hidden dangers, that is, is free from evil, and for softness underfoot, that is, a mind at ease. Hence they petition also '*gwenyi ko kwel gwath me jalko ko*', 'make clear a way for us in the place where we journey', and '*gwenyi ko gwath*', 'clear for us a place'. Here again the sense is mainly allegorical. The words do not usually refer to any particular place or journey but to the journey through life, and the making clear of the way does not refer only, or even at all, to any particular dangers of travelling through the bush but to all the sufferings and evils which beset the life of man.

Peace and deliverance are the key-notes of these petitions. They are seen again in the phrase '*kwoth ngaci rum yieni, romni yieko*', 'God, thou (who) knowest how to support [or care for] souls, support [or care for] our souls'. The general sense of the prayer is that God should protect those who supplicate him as a parent protects his helpless infant. This desire for peace, deliverance, and protection is summed up in another common petition: '*akoteko*', 'let us be'. I am not certain whether the verb here is *tek*, to be alive, or, as I think it is, *te*, to be. There is in any case a considerable overlap in meaning between the two words, and in this context there would not be any great difference in meaning between the one and the other, for the sense is: let us go on living and as we are. Nuer are asking for life, but not just life in the sense of living but of living abundantly, free from the troubles and sufferings which make life, as we say, not worth living. That this is the right interpretation is further suggested by another expression frequently heard in prayer, '*akolapko*', which also has to be translated 'let us be', and here again signifies, and in a deeper moral sense, life in the mode and manner of leading it. The verb is *labe*. It expresses a continuous state and can, I think, only be used of persons. It indicates a particular quality of a person which is part of his nature as that person and is therefore unchangeable, as in the phrases '*labe kuaar*', 'he is a leopard-skin priest', '*laba Nac*', 'I am a Jinaca clansman', '*labo ran*', 'I am a Nuer' or 'I am a man', and *labbo cok*', 'we are (like) ants [in the sight of God]'.

It will have been observed that these expressions in Nuer prayers, as is the case among other peoples, are often repetitions, but rather in the form of parallelisms than of tautologies, for they

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are variations of meaning within the same general meaning. Different images are used to express the same general idea, each stressing a different aspect of it.[1] 782 196

The distinctive and significant features of Nuer mystical and moral theology cannot be extracted from the short affirmations and petitions which constitute their prayers if these are considered entirely by themselves without Nuer comments on them and without some knowledge of their ritual and of their ideas and values in general, but once these have been delineated they are seen to be summed up concisely in the prayers. They are asking God for deliverance from evil, so that they may have peace, denoted by a variety of images with emotional and ideational relatedness—sleep, lightness, ease, coolness, softness, prayer, the domestic hearth, abundant life, and life as it should be according to the nature of the person. As I have explained, Nuer regard the ills they wish to be delivered from as due to faults and they think they can only be avoided by keeping in the right in their dealings with God and men. These two ideas, of being in the right and of deliverance from evil, are basic to their religious thought and they are also, of course, complementary. A fuller understanding of these cardinal concepts of Nuer religion can be obtained only by taking into account their attitudes towards other spirits associated with God, their conception of the soul and of sin, and their sacrificial rites. 782

[1] Archbishop R. C. Trench discusses this feature of prayer in his *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 1871, *passim*.

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776 known to the west than to the east of the Nile. It appears to be
177 associated with a cattle-plague, also called *diu*, and it may have a further association with the sun, but I am uncertain of this; and I must say that this uncertainty may not be entirely due to my ignorance, for in many cases these associations between spirits and natural phenomena are not emphasized by Nuer and are even vague and fanciful ways of giving a bare outline of individuality to the spirits. The spirit *col* has associations with rain, lightning, a river believed to run through the sky, a tree called *nyuot* (*Cordia Rothii*), of which Nuer say that 'God loves it', and the *colwic* spirits who are the souls of those killed by lightning. This spirit is probably a Nuer conception, but then it is hardly conceived of as an individual spirit, but rather as all the *colwic* spirits merged together. *Rang* or *rangdit* and its son *mabith* are
194 both spirits associated with wild animals and hunting, *mabith* having a special association with giraffes; and it may be noted that the word *rang* means also 'a good spearsman', that is, one who shines, for yet a further meaning of the word is 'sunshine' and its verbal form means 'to shine' or 'to dazzle'. In some contexts the word could be translated 'light'. The two spirits are said to have come from the country of the *karegni*, the Baggara Arabs, whom the western Nuer used to raid for stock and women; and it is perhaps significant that the Baggara are great hunters of giraffes. Further, Dr. Lienhardt has pointed out to me that the Rek Dinka say that their spirit *garang*, which is also associated with giraffes and is doubtless the same as the Nuer *rang*, came to them from the Twic Dinka who neighbour the Baggara Arabs.[1] The spirit *mani*, whose ox-names are *luthpara* and *bilcuany*, and which is particularly associated with war, is certainly of foreign origin and I believe that it is generally regarded by the western Nuer as having come from somewhere to the north of them. It is therefore perhaps worth drawing attention to the belief in a mysterious power called *mani* in northern Darfur.[2] The spirit *mai* is asso-

[1] This spirit evidently has today a wide distribution among the Dinka for it is mentioned by Mr. Johnston (*op. cit.*, p. 124) as being regarded by the Bor Dinka as a son of *deng*. Mr. Johnston says that 'in every respect his attributes are equivalent to those of Satan'.

[2] A. J. Arkell, 'Mani Magic in Northern Darfur', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936. As Mr. Arkell suggests, there may be some connexion between the Darfur *mani* magic and the *mani* magic of the Azande (E. E. Evans-Pritchard, '*Mani*, a Zande Secret Society', *ibid.*, 1931). The word *mani* is almost certainly a loan-word in the Nuer language.

Nuer call such a charismatic person *gwan kwoth*, owner or possessor of Spirit, the name of the particular spirit sometimes being added, as *gwan kwoth deang*, the possessor of the spirit *deng*, or *gwan kwoth mani*, the possessor of the spirit *mani*. He is also referred to as the *guk* of the spirit, a word meaning a leather bag. The prophet is a bag containing the spirit. 'Possessor' might seem to be here an inappropriate translation of *gwan* ('father', 'owner', or 'master') since the spirit possesses the man rather than the man the spirit, but the man does own the spirit in the sense that it is in him and gives him spiritual power ordinary people lack.

It appears to be first known that a man has become possessed permanently by a spirit, either without or after sickness, by sustained abnormal behaviour and occasional bouts of frenzy. In these states, which are said to occur most frequently in the earlier phases of possession, when the spirit comes, or leaps, upon, or moves the prophet (to use Old Testament expressions) he acts like a madman (*yong*), and Nuer cannot always distinguish for certain at this stage between a prophet and a madman or epileptic (*gwan noka*); but if there is any doubt it is dispelled by the later behaviour of a prophet, for he ceases to prophesy only when possessed in the narrow sense of being for the time out of his mind and gives spiritual guidance when in a normal state to those who ask for it. From time to time he may have renewed mantic seizures, but these are regarded by Nuer as only outward signs of a spiritual power which directs his utterances whenever he speaks as a prophet and also when, as sometimes happens, he speaks as a judge and political leader. Nuer conceive of permanent possession of this kind, in contrast to temporary seizure in the form of Spirit-induced sickness and mediumistic trances, as a filling with Spirit as with air. They use the word *guang* to denote Spirit penetrating or entering into and filling the man. A prophet is a person filled with, or inspired by, Spirit, which controls him as the *Ruah Adonai* controlled the prophets of the Old Testament. The word *guang*, which has much the same general sense in Dinka,[1] is used for such actions as scraping out a gourd, hollowing out a canoe or mortar, or the burrowing of a hole by a wild beast. Something is hollowed out to allow entry for something else. Dr. Mary Smith tells me that Nuer have told her that when a spirit *gwange ran*,

[1] R. Tucker, *English-Dinka Dictionary*, 1941, p. 216.

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X 776 say *'e kwoth'*, 'it is Spirit', meaning that its doing so is a spiritual signal presaging disaster. A lion is not thought of as being in itself Spirit; it is a beast. But it may, on account of some event which brings it into a peculiar relation to man, such as being born, as Nuer think sometimes happens, as twin to a human child, be regarded as a revelation of Spirit for a particular family and lineage. Likewise, diseases, or rather their symptoms, are not thought [758] of as being in themselves Spirit, but their appearance in individuals may be regarded as manifestations of Spirit for those individuals. Spirit acts, and thereby reveals itself, through these creatures. This distinction between the nature of a thing and what it may signify in certain situations or for certain persons is very evident in totemic relationships. A crocodile is Spirit for certain persons, but it is not thought to be in its nature Spirit, for others kill and eat it. It is because Nuer separate, and quite explicitly when questioned about the matter, spiritual conceptions from such material things as may nevertheless be said 'to be' the conceptions, that they are able to maintain the unity and autonomy of Spirit in spite of a great diversity of accidents and are able to speak of Spirit without reference to any of its material manifestations.

So far I have been mostly speaking of the conception of God and of those of his refractions which belong to the category of the sky or of the above. With two possible exceptions,[1] we cannot say that the things said 'to be' these spirits are material symbols or representations of them; at any rate not in the same sense as we can speak of things being symbols of those lesser refractions of Spirit Nuer call spirits of the earth or of the below, in which God stands in a special relationship to lineages and individuals—such diverse things as beasts, birds, reptiles, trees, phosphorescent objects, and pieces of wood. These lesser refractions of Spirit, regarded as distinct spirits in relation to each other, cannot, unlike the spirits of the air, easily be thought of except in relation to the things by reference to which they derive their individuality, and which are said 'to be' them.

X 776 When, therefore, Nuer say that the pied crow is the spirit *buk* ●196 or that a snake is Spirit, the word 'is' has a different sense from what it has in the statement that rain is Spirit. The difference does not

[1] The spear *wic* may be said to stand for the spirit *wic* (pp. 31 and 141), and the pied crow may be said to stand for the spirit *buk* which in the most terrestrially conceived of among the greater spirits (pp. 32–3 and 81).

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merely lie in the fact that *kwoth* has here a more restricted connotation, being spoken of in reference to a particular and exclusive refraction—a spirit—rather than comprehensively as God or Spirit in its oneness. It lies also in the relation understood in the statement between its subject (snake or crow) and its predicate (Spirit or a spirit). The snake in itself is not divine activity whereas rain and lightning are. The story accounting for a totemic relationship may present it as arising from a revelation of divine activity, but once it has become an established relationship between a lineage and a natural species, the species is a representation or symbol of Spirit to the lineage. What then is here meant when it is said that the pied crow 'is' *buk* or that a snake 'is' Spirit: that the symbol 'is' what it symbolizes? Clearly Nuer do not mean that the crow is the same as *buk*, for *buk* is also conceived of as being in the sky and also in rivers, which the pied crow certainly is not; nor that a snake is the same as some spiritual refraction, for they say that the snake just crawls on the earth while the spirit it is said to be is in the sky. What then is being predicated about the crow or snake in the statement that either is Spirit or a spirit?

It will be simpler to discuss this question in the first place in relation to a totemic relationship. When a Nuer says of a creature '*e nyang*', 'it is a crocodile', he is saying that it is a crocodile and not some other creature, but when he says, to explain why a person behaves in an unusual manner towards crocodiles '*e kwothdien*', 'it (the crocodile) is their spirit', he is obviously making a different sort of statement. He is not saying what kind of creature it is (for it is understood that he is referring to the crocodile) but that what he refers to is Spirit for certain people. But he is also not saying that the crocodile is Spirit—it is not so for him—but that certain people so regard it. Therefore a Nuer would not make a general statement that '*nyang e kwoth*', 'crocodile is Spirit', but would only say, in referring to the crocodile, '*e kwoth*', 'it is Spirit', the distinction between the two statements being that the first would mean that the crocodile is Spirit for everyone whereas the second, being made in a special context of situation, means that it is Spirit for certain persons who are being discussed, or are understood, in that context. Likewise, whilst it can be said of the crocodile that it is Spirit, it cannot be said of Spirit that it is the crocodile, or rather, if a statement is framed in this form it can only be made when the word *kwoth* has a pronominal suffix which gives it the

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meaning of 'his spirit', 'their spirit', and so forth; in other words, where the statement makes it clear that what is being spoken of is Spirit conceived of in relation to particular persons only. We still have to ask, however, in what sense the crocodile is Spirit for these persons.

Since it is difficult to discuss a statement that something which can be observed, crocodile, is something more than what it appears to be when this something more, Spirit, cannot be observed, it is helpful first to consider two examples of Nuer statements that things are something more than they appear to be when both the subject term and the predicate term refer to observable phenomena.

When a cucumber is used as a sacrificial victim Nuer speak of it as an ox. In doing so they are asserting something rather more than that it takes the place of an ox. They do not, of course, say that cucumbers are oxen, and in speaking of a particular cucumber as an ox in a sacrificial situation they are only indicating that it may be thought of as an ox in that particular situation; and they act accordingly by performing the sacrificial rites as closely as possible to what happens when the victim is an ox. The resemblance is conceptual, not perceptual. The 'is' rests on qualitative analogy. And the expression is asymmetrical, a cucumber is an ox, but an ox is not a cucumber.

A rather different example of this way of speaking is the Nuer assertion that twins are one person and that they are birds.[1] When they say 'twins are not two persons, they are one person' they are not saying that they are one individual but that they have a single personality. It is significant that in speaking of the unity of twins they only use the word *ran*, which, like our word 'person', leaves sex, age, and other distinguishing qualities of individuals undefined. They would not say that twins of the same sex were one *dhol*, boy, or one *nyal*, girl, but they do say, whether they are of the same sex or not, that they are one *ran*, person. Their single social personality is something over and above their physical duality, a duality which is evident to the senses and is indicated by the plural form used when speaking of twins and by their treatment in all respects in ordinary social life as two quite distinct individuals. It is only in certain ritual situations, and symbolically,

[1] I have given a more detailed account in 'Customs and Beliefs Relating to Twins among the Nilotic Nuer', *Uganda Journal*, 1936.

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that the unity of twins is expressed, particularly in ceremonies connected with marriage and death, in which the personality undergoes a change. Thus, when the senior of male twins marries, the junior acts with him in the ritual acts he has to perform; female twins ought to be married on the same day; and no mortuary ceremonies are held for twins because, for one reason, one of them cannot be cut off from the living without the other. A woman whose twin brother had died some time before said to Miss Soule, to whom I am indebted for the information, 'Is not his soul still living? I am alive, and we are really children of God.'

There is no mortuary ceremony even when the second twin dies, and I was told that twins do not attend the mortuary ceremonies held for their dead kinsfolk, nor mourn them, because a twin is a *ran nhial*, a person of the sky or of the above. He is also spoken of as *gat kwoth*, a child of God. These dioscuric descriptions of twins are common to many peoples, but the Nuer are peculiar in holding also that they are birds. They say 'a twin is not a person (*ran*), he is a bird (*dit*)', although, as we have just seen, they assert, in another sense, that twins are one person (*ran*). Here they are using the word *ran* in the sense of a human being as distinct from any other creature. The dogma is expressed in various ways. Very often a twin is given the proper name *Dit*, bird, *Gwong*, guineafowl, or *Ngec*, francolin.[1] All Nuer consider it shameful, at any rate for adults, to eat any sort of bird or its eggs, but were a twin to do this it would be much more than shameful. It would be *nueer*, a grave sin, for twins respect (*thek*) birds, because, Nuer say, twins are also birds, and they avoid any sort of contact with them. The equivalence of twins and birds is expressed particularly in connexion with death. When an infant twin dies people say *'ce par'*, 'he has flown away', using the word denoting the flight of birds. Infant twins who die, as so often happens, are not buried, as other infants are, but are covered in

[1] That the names, at least all those I have heard, are taken from birds lowest in the scale of Nuer reckoning requires comment, especially in view of the argument I later develop. It may be due to the Nuer habit of speaking of their relation to God—the birth of twins constitutes such a context—by comparing themselves with lowly things. On the other hand, it may be simply in keeping with the logic of the analogy. Twins belong to the class of the above but are below; just as guineafowl and francolin belong to the class of birds, which as a class is in the category of the above, but are almost earthbound.

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a reed basket or winnowing-tray and placed in the fork of a tree, because birds rest in trees. I was told that birds which feed on carrion would not molest the bodies but would look at their dead kinsmen—twins and birds are also said to be kin, though the usage may be regarded as metaphorical—and fly away again. When I asked a Nuer whether adult twins would be buried like other people he replied 'no, of course not, they are birds and their souls go up into the air'. A platform, not used in the normal mode of burial, is erected in the grave and a hide placed over it. The body is laid on this hide and covered with a second hide. Earth is then carefully patted over the upper hide instead of being shovelled in quickly, as in the burial of an ordinary person. I was told that the corpse is covered with earth lest a hyena eat it and afterwards drink at a pool, for men might drink at the same pool and die from contamination (*nueer*).

It is understandable that Nuer draw an analogy between the multiple hatching of eggs and the dual birth of twins. The analogy is explicit, and, through an extension of it, the flesh of crocodiles and turtles is also forbidden to twins on the ground that these creatures too, like birds, lay eggs. Miss Soule once had a girl twin in her household who refused fish for the same reason—the only case of its kind known to either of us. But the analogy between multiple births in birds and men does not adequately explain why it is with birds that human twins are equated when there are many other creatures which habitually bear several young at the same time and in a manner more closely resembling human parturition. It cannot be just multiple birth which leads Nuer to say that twins are birds, for these other creatures are not respected by twins on that account. The prohibition on eating eggs is clearly secondary, and it is extended to include crocodiles and turtles—and by Miss Soule's girl fish also—not because they lay eggs but because their laying eggs makes them like birds. Moreover, it is difficult to understand why a resemblance of the kind should in any case be made so much of. The multiple hatching of chicks is doubtless a resemblance which greatly strengthens the idea of twins being birds, but it is only part of a more complex analogical representation which requires to be explained in more general terms of Nuer religious thought. A twin, on account of his peculiar manner of conception is, though not Spirit himself, a special creation, and, therefore, manifestation of Spirit; and when he dies his

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the same time or a totemic spirit can be in any number of members of a species at the same time.

There is a further fact to be taken into consideration. When Nuer speak of lights in the bush or of fetish-bundles as Spirit they normally would not use the generic word for Spirit, *kwoth*, or even its plural and fractionary form *kuth*, spirits. They would say of them that they were *bieli* or *kulangni*. So whilst it is true that *bieli* and *kulangni* are *kuth piny*, spirits of the below, the fact that they are given distinctive class names and that consequently it is possible for Nuer to explain them by saying that they are Spirit or that they are spirits attached to certain persons shows that though they are regarded as Spirit or spirits they are also somehow regarded differently from the way in which Spirit is usually regarded. So the problem here is further complicated by a third term being understood in the statement about something that it is something else: the light is *bieli*, and the *bieli* are Spirit; the bundle is *kulangni*, and the *kulangni* are Spirit. This added complication may be supposed to be due to the fact that though these spirits cannot be said to be identical with things they are more closely bound to them than is the case with other, and higher, spiritual conceptions; and the more Spirit is thought to be bound to visible forms the less it is thought of as Spirit and the more it is thought of in terms of what it is bound to. In other words, there are gradations of the conception of Spirit from pure unattached Spirit to Spirit associated with human, animal, and lifeless objects and more and more closely bound to what it is associated with the farther down the scale one goes. This scale of Spirit, as I have explained earlier, is related to segmentation of the social order and is represented by Nuer by levels of space as well as by levels and degrees of immanence. So when Nuer say of something that it is Spirit we have to consider not only what 'is' means but also what 'Spirit' means. Nevertheless, though the sense of '*kwoth*' varies with the context, the word refers always to something of the same essence; and what is being said, directly or indirectly, in the statements is always the same, that something is that essence.

We can make some contribution towards a solution of the problem in the light of this discussion. When Nuer say of something '*e kwoth*', 'it is Spirit', or give it a name of which it can be further said 'that is Spirit', the 'is' does not in all instances have

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the same connotation. It may be an elliptical statement, signifying that the thing referred to is a manifestation of Spirit in the sense of God revealing himself in instruments or effects. Or it may be a symbolical statement, signifying that what in itself is not Spirit but represents Spirit to certain persons is for these persons Spirit in such contexts as direct attention to the symbolic character of an object to the exclusion of whatever other qualities it may possess. Or it may be a statement signifying something closer to identity of the thing spoken of with what it is said to be, Spirit. The statements never, however, signify complete identity of anything with Spirit, because Nuer think of Spirit as something more than any of its modes, signs, effects, representations, and so forth, and also as something of a different nature from the created things which they are. They are not able to define what it is, but when it acts within the phenomenal world they say it has come from above, where it is conceived to be and whence it is thought to descend. Consequently Spirit in any form can be detached in the mind from the things said to be it, even if they cannot always be so easily detached from the idea of Spirit.

I can take the analysis no farther; but if it is inconclusive it at least shows, if it is correct, how wide of the mark have been anthropological attempts to explain the kind of statements we have been considering. Anthropological explanations display two main errors. The first, best exemplified in the writings of Lévy-Bruhl, is that when a people say that something is something else which is different they are contravening the Law of Contradiction and substituting for it a law of their own prelogical way of thinking, that of mystical participation.[1] I hope at least to have shown that Nuer do not assert identity between the two things. They may say that one is the other and in certain situations act towards it as though it were that other, or something like it, but they are aware, no doubt with varying degrees of awareness, and readily say, though with varying degrees of clarity and emphasis, that the two things are different. Moreover, it will have been noted that in the seemingly equivocal statements we have considered, with perhaps one exception, the terms cannot be reversed. The exception

[1] I refer to his earlier writings, in particular *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910) and *La Mentalité primitive* (1922). The second part of his last book, *L'Expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs* (1938), which took account of modern research, is a brilliant discourse on the problems we have been discussing.

765 782 [561] ceremony, and I was told that it is dangerous for them even to smell the cooking meat. Everyone then moved off to sit in front of a hut to listen to the commemorative orations, which are also invocations; and here were spread out on the ground the ghost's possessions, his fighting-spears and fishing-spears, his beads, his metal arm-rings, his ostrich-shell girdles, his pipe, and, since his son was senior government interpreter in the district, his clothes and whistle, articles not possessed by ordinary Nuer. At the side of these were placed the heads and hides of the cattle which had just been sacrificed. The people sat with their backs to the now rising sun and facing the direction of the setting sun because 'death follows the setting sun'. Nuer say that 'the west is the side of [123] death, the east the side of life', and the verb *kwony* in their ●[196] language means both 'to bury' and 'to set' (the sun). When they sacrifice an ox for a sick man they hope it will fall towards the east. The master of ceremonies (pp. 287–9) of the ghost's family made the first commemorative oration, after throwing some tobacco towards east and west. As he spoke he walked up and down in front of the people brandishing the spear with which the animals had been sacrificed. He commenced his address (*lam*) by shouting out his own name. He must also have shouted out his clan spear-name, though I have not recorded it in my notebooks.

I did not take down his address at the time but I was told later that a master of ceremonies speaks in this wise: 'God, now thou hast given us badness, or is it simply the lot of creation? [Is the death thou hast sent us a special evil designed for us or has the dead man merely suffered what soon or late comes to all created things?] Now thou [has] taken so-and-so [the name the dead man] now he has become one of thy people, turn about and take him right away. We who are left in the world, give us peace. Let his children who remain in the world be at peace. He is not finished, his children will carry on his name. In the future they will bear his name. Let no further evil befall us.' The master of ceremonies is now speaking to the ghost: 'So-and-so, my brother [or 'my father' if he was a much older man], now thou art one of God's people. Do not forget us, let it be thy habit to speak [on our behalf] to thy father [God]. When we go into the bush let us tread on wild rice [avoid all dangers and troubles]. Let us beget children. May all evil be taken away from us now, and may we remain in peace.' The master of ceremonies again addresses God: 'God, and

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II

761 Two main questions arise from the account I have given of ceremonies connected with death: In what way do Nuer conceive of the disintegration of the person at death and how do they regard those who have departed? I discuss these two questions in turn, but I must say at the outset that Nuer are neither very clear nor very explicit in what they say about the matters they concern.

As I have said, Nuer avoid as far as possible speaking of death and when they have to do so they speak about it in such a way as to leave no doubt that they regard it as the most dreadful of all dreadful things. This horror of death[1] fits in with their almost total lack of eschatology. Theirs is a this-worldly religion, a religion of abundant life and the fullness of days, and they neither pretend to know, nor, I think, do they care, what happens to them after death.

761 774 196 When a man dies the flesh, the life, and the soul separate themselves out. The idea of *ring*, flesh, presents no difficulties. All creatures have *ring*, and it is what, when a man dies, is committed to the earth. *Yiegh*, life, is a more difficult concept, especially as, as will be seen, its meaning overlaps with that of *tie*, soul—they are different aspects of what in a living man is a single whole. *Yiegh* means both 'breath' and 'life'. In the sense of 'life' it may mean, according to the context, either mere life, what is common to man and all living creatures, or it may include the intellectual and moral faculties as well. At one end the meaning is much the same as *teeh*, life, in contrast to *liagh*, death, and at the other end it approximates to *tie*, the soul. A man's *yiegh* may be stronger or weaker according to circumstances. When he is drunk he is partly dead, and also when he is ill. Sleep is also a partial death, the death, Nuer say, for which people do not mourn. When a man is dying the life slowly weakens and then it departs from him altogether, and Nuer say it has gone to God from whom it came. Nuer ideas on this matter are relatively simple and also easy for us to understand. Life comes from God and to him it returns.

[1] Horror of death is probably the reason for the great reluctance with which Nuer discuss dreams, even impersonally and with reference only to stereotyped interpretations, for these only too often are prognostications of death: as when a man dreams of death, or of a fish called *rec wa cuv*, black fish, or of a turtle walking about which the dreamer fails to catch.

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SOUL AND GHOST

Tie corresponds to the *anima* in scholastic writings and presents many of the difficulties of that word. It would appear to be that part of the *yiegh* which embraces the intellectual and moral faculties of man, his rational soul as distinct from his mere life as a living creature.[1] It is used in varying contexts in a variety of senses and might sometimes be translated 'cleverness', 'wisdom', and 'disposition', but the English word that best covers its general sense is 'soul'. It is true that sometimes 'life' is a more appropriate rendering than 'soul', just as *yiegh* may sometimes be more suitably translated 'soul' than 'life', but when this is so it is the psychic life rather than the animal life that is to be understood. The essential difference, in spite of mutual overlap, between the two conceptions is clearly to be seen in the already related case of Gatbuogh. He ostensibly had breath and life (*yiegh*), but what made him a person (*ran*), his soul (*tie*), had departed. Hence, although he was described as 'a living ghost' he was also said to be 'dead'. It is to be seen also in the Nuer dogma about twins, that they are one person. Ostensibly each has his independent individual life, but they have a single soul and are therefore one person. The distinction also emerges at death. The *yiegh*, the life, returns to God at the moment of death, so we may suppose—and Nuer remarks on the whole lead us to the same conclusion—that what survives death in an independent, if shadowy, existence as a ghost or shade is the *tie*, the soul. I return to this aspect of the matter later.

Associated with the *tie* is the *tiep*, the common Nilotic word for a shadow or reflection. In Nuer it may simply mean 'shade', as the shade of a tree, and also the reflection of anything in water. When used for the human shadow it might sometimes be translated 'soul', though in its general sense *tiep* cannot be equated with *tie* and when it is used in a context where we might expect *tie* to be used it would seem to be in the sense of an external representation or symbol of the soul. There may be here a merging of ideas, but Nuer are nevertheless fully aware that a man's shadow is only a reflection visible at certain times and in certain circumstances

[1] Psychical functions are associated with the head and the heart. The head is the seat of intelligence and will and by synecdoche stands for the whole person, especially when a pronominal suffix is added. The heart is similarly used as a periphrasis for the personal pronoun when a man's affections, emotions, or sentiments are referred to. (Cf. Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 1949, pp. 77–88.)

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774 [196] and is not an integral part of him. They do not attach any importance to it and there are no beliefs and practices connected with it. They presumably see an analogy between a man's shadow and his soul, the shadow being the best way they can find to figure the sort of thing the soul might be. The analogy may derive from the idea of ghosts being shadowy replicas of the living. The fact that other creatures and things have shadows does not lead Nuer to say that they have souls; and since they have no souls, in their case the shadow does not at any time have a figurative meaning.

Nuer hold no decided opinions about the nature of the soul, which does not surprise us in view of their lack of interest in what happens after death, or of how there comes to be one. They know that the foetus begins as a result of the male sperm entering into [842] the womb. The child is begotten (*dieth*) by man. But it is also created (*cak*) by God, so it appears that they think of conception as a product of this combination of human and divine action. But it does not necessarily follow that because a man is alive he has a soul. Gatbuogh was alive. So when we observe that Nuer [858] do not mourn or hold a mortuary ceremony for a dead child, it suggests to us that either they do not think of a small child as having a soul or they regard it as immature. It is only when he begins to take part in activities of the social life that he is said to be a person (*ran*), and Nuer sometimes indicate that the sign of having become a person is the removal of the second lower incisor teeth, which is done when the child is about seven or eight years of age. On the other hand they speak of infant twins having one soul. Clearly they hold no definite opinion about the matter.

1771 828 Though Nuer would not themselves bring the ideas of flesh, life, and soul so neatly together, we can see that taken together they are covered by the concepts of both *pwony* and *ran*. *Pwony* means the whole creature, the individual or the self, what is one man and not another. '*Pwonyda*' is 'myself' and '*pwonyda pany*' is 'my very self'. *Ran* is what we may describe as 'the person', the social being as distinct from the individual creature. Its plural form *nath* is the word Nuer use to distinguish themselves from other peoples. They are *nei ti nath*, people (in the general sense of the word) who are people (in the sense of persons as Nuer think of themselves). *Pwony* is, as it were, the total organism, *ran* the total personality. As I have explained, a small child is the one but not

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775 community (of the departed) which all, each in his turn, must join, or what it is like.

It is possible that the apparent contradiction between being under the earth and being with God in the sky arises from the vagueness of the concept of *tie* and in particular from the absence of any dogma that it is the *tie*, soul, which becomes a *joogh* (pl., *jook*), ghost. It is perhaps important that Nuer always speak of the *joogh* of the departed and never of his *tie* when speaking of his survival as a person. They speak of the 'ghosts' of the dead and not of the 'souls' of the dead. This distinction would seem to allow both for the idea of the dead leading some sort of existence in the Nuer sheol as shadowy replicas of the living and also at the same time for the idea that their souls are taken on high by God. They cannot say anything more definite about this question of what is conceived to survive, or how or where.

There is a further question: when does a man become a ghost? Here again there is no formal doctrine to help us. We have to draw conclusions from what seems to be implicit in the mortuary rites. As we have seen, they not only close the period of mourning and cleanse the home and the kin from the pollution of death but also send the dead man away to join the ghosts and cut him off formally and finally from the living. Only when that has been done can his property be taken by his heirs and his widows cohabit with those with whom they have decided to live. It follows that the dead must be thought to be in some way still among the living till he is dispatched by these rites to the community of the ghosts.[1]

775 The word for ghost, *joogh*, is found in various forms in all the
191 Nilotic languages. In most of the Shilluk Log-speaking languages it means 'God' or 'Spirit'. In some of the Nilotic languages, including Nuer, the word is either the same as, or is closely related to, that used to denote plagues, pestilences, murrains, and indeed any serious sickness; and, this being so, it is perhaps wise to point out that such calamities are not thought to come from the ghosts but from God: *'ce jok ben piny'*, Nuer say, *'ca kam piny e kwoth'*, 'the murrain came to earth, it was given to earth by God'. In Nuer

[1] Robert Hertz ('Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort', *L'Année sociologique*, vol. x, 1907, reprinted in *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et de folklore*, 1928) was the first to draw attention to the universality of this idea and to show the great variety and complexity of its forms.

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the word *joagh* also means 'back' or 'behind' and this cannot be fortuitous, not only because in Dinka the word for a troublesome ghost, *cien*, likewise also means 'back' and 'behind', but also because it is a common Nuer refrain in speaking to, or about, the ghosts that they should have their backs to the living, the Nuer way of saying that they should keep away from the living. If they return to the living, except when summoned as witnesses on formal occasions, it is only to cause trouble, to fetch the living to join them in the place of the dead or to punish them for faults and shortcomings. We have already noted how pronounced is this apotropaic motif in the mortuary rites, and especially in the invocations spoken at them, the speakers frequently adjuring the dead '*bi rodu ric*', 'turn thyself about'. They ask the dead to turn away from the living, to turn his back on them. Father Crazzolara notes the same sentiment. He says that the dead are buried with their backs to the huts and their faces to the bush and that a dead man is addressed: 'turn thine eyes to the bush, do not turn them to the home'. He comments that this means that the dead man must not regard the doings of the living, for he might see something which offends him and draw another person after him to death.[1] The living do not want the dead to take any interest in their lives. The dead had best look after their own affairs and let the living look after theirs. That the ideas of 'behind' and of 'the ghosts' are related is further shown by the fact that Nuer sometimes use the phrase 'to go behind' as a euphemism for 'to go to the ghosts' and hence 'to die'.

It is consistent with the idea of the ghosts being turned away from the living so that they do not see their affairs that the ghosts are relatively unimportant in Nuer religious thought and practice, even the troublesome ones, which I discuss later; and they are in the ordinary course of affairs seldom mentioned. But though Nuer pay them little attention they cannot entirely ignore them, for there are some occasions when they are directly concerned with what is happening and their relationship to the living has to be emphasized, occasions of collective sacrifice (pp. 198–9), such as their funeral and mortuary ceremonies, settlement of blood-feuds started on account of their violent deaths, and the marriages of their children. Occasionally also dutiful sons honour their memory by sacrifice, especially if they have had vivid dreams

[1] Op. cit., p. 173.

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CHAPTER VII

SIN

I

NUER do not think of the relation of man to God as one of soul, as a separate entity, to Spirit but as one of the whole man to Spirit. The state of the conscience, as we would call it, may be one element in the relation but peace of mind is very much bound up with welfare of body and estate. This is evident from the way they regard the breach of an interdiction which is thought to bring into operation directly, and often almost immediately, spiritual sanctions. We may speak of such a breach as sin. 776 783

Sin with the suffering it brings about is central to the study of Nuer religion. If God was thought by Nuer merely to have created man and then to have ceased to interest himself in human affairs there would be no point at all in their paying any attention to him and sacrifice would be a meaningless act. It is because Spirit constantly manifests itself to men and intervenes in their enterprises and affairs that we have the subject of this book, a religion. I draw attention again to the paradox I mentioned in Chapter I, of God being far away in the sky and yet present with men on earth; but we now see that it might better be described as an intuitive understanding of the relation between God and man. God is far removed from man in that man cannot ascend to him. He is very near in that he can descend to man.

Nuer, like other people, want it both ways. They want God to be near at hand, for his presence aids them, and they want him to be far away, for it is dangerous to them. It is particularly dangerous in such situations and relationships as are marked off by religious interdictions.

One of the more important interdictory concepts is that of *thek*, a word we have had occasion to consider earlier in connexion with totems. It has a sense which I translate 'to respect', the word 'respect' being used throughout this book only where Nuer would use *thek*. The word has a similar, but perhaps wider, range of meaning among the Dinka. I 196 [171]

[See p. 79, cat. 16 -- Analyst]
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196 576 264 Nuer use it for the attitude and behaviour expected of a man towards his wife's parents and to a lesser extent her other kinsmen also. He expresses his respect particularly by abstaining from eating in their homes and from appearing naked before them. A newly married woman respects her husband's people, especially his parents. She is circumspect in her relations with them, avoiding the parents as far as is practicable. Until her first child is born she may not eat in the home of her husband's parents—that is to say, in her husband's home. Newly wedded husbands and wives respect one another. In public each treats the other with marked reserve and they will not eat together, or even see each other eat or drink, till some time after their first child is born. Of the many European habits which are strange to Nuer the one I have heard them speak of with the greatest disapproval is that of a man eating [551] with his wife in public. Husband and wife also respect each other's name by avoiding its use. Sweethearts display similar behaviour. The respect a husband shows to his wife's parents and her respect for his parents is shared in varying degrees by the kin on both sides and for varying periods of time. I need not discuss details here. It may, however, be noted that avoidance with regard to food and drink between affines which is likely to have altogether lapsed, except in the case of the husband's avoidance of his wife's parents, and to have been relaxed even in his case with time and the birth of children, is demanded with extreme vigour should the wife bear twins. Then the paternal and maternal kin of the twins are for a short time in the position of parties to a blood-feud. They may not, under penalty of death (*nueer*), eat or drink or share a pipe together until sacrifices, the meat of which is divided between them, have been made.

196 583 784 There are also avoidances concerning bridewealth cattle which derive from these relationships of respect relating to marriage. A bride respects the *ghok lipe*, the cattle of her betrothal. These are the cattle her future husband hands over in earnest of his intention to marry her, and they count as the first payment of her bridewealth. She will not drink of their milk, lest she harm the cattle by doing so, till after the ritual consummation of the union, and possibly not even then, for I was also told by some Nuer that while she is still newly wedded and has not yet borne a child (*ciek ma kau*) she abstains from the milk of the cows her husband's people have paid for her. Likewise, even when a husband can drink milk

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in the home of his parents-in-law they avoid offering him milk from the cattle he has paid them. Further, if there is a divorce and the bridewealth cattle are returned to the husband's people they sacrifice a goat before they drink of their milk.

Nuer 'respect with regard to food' unrelated people (*nei ti gwagh*) of the opposite sex, especially if they are unmarried and possible sweethearts. They will not eat with them or even see them, or be seen by them, eating and drinking, and food must not be mentioned when they are both present. The sexes, unless they are kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer feel so strongly about this avoidance that I was obliged to observe it strictly myself.

Another situation in reference to which one hears the word *thek* is homicide. I discuss it in greater detail in Chapter XII. A man who slays another respects water—he may not drink—until a priest has made sacrifice and cut his right arm. Then until the blood-feud is closed by payment of cattle and by sacrifices the kin of the slayer and the kin of the slain may not eat or drink from vessels from which the other has eaten or drunk. They respect the vessels and the food and water of the other party. Even to use the same vessels at the home of a third party who is in no way connected with the feud may entail the most serious consequences. A third party may cause death to one side or the other by eating or drinking with both.

Another use of the word *thek*, which, as always, contains the idea of avoidance, is in reference to burial and to mortuary sacrifices. Those who bury a corpse respect water—they may not drink—until they have been cleansed. Members of a dead man's age-set abstain from the meat of the cattle sacrificed at the ceremony held to close the period of mourning for him. They are said to respect the meat. It has been noted earlier (p. 55) that people may not eat or drink in the homes of close kin of a person struck by lightning before they have sacrificed. Another use is in connexion with the eldest child of a marriage. He respects the spoons of his parents and the sleeping-hide of his mother. He is careful not to eat with the first or sit on the second. Were he to do so he might cause the mother to be barren and injure the father, himself, and the cattle. A man is also said to respect his as yet unconceived children by abstaining from congress with his wife when she is menstruating[1]

[1] He is not said to *thek*, respect, his wife when she is menstruating. He

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196 784 [334] [341] [334] and while she is suckling an infant, for a child born of union in these forbidden periods is a child of misfortune. A woman in her periods respects the milk of cows; she may only drink goat's milk at this time. Nuer also use the word *thek* to refer to the prohibition on men milking cows. Men respect the cows with regard to milking. Milking is done only by women and boys. It can happen, however, that on journeys there are no women or boys present, and in these circumstances men may milk the cows on condition that each gets another to milk his cows for him. I learnt in 1936 that a youth, Tot, who in 1931 had been a member of my household, had died as a result of having milked a cow at night in the byre of his home and drunk the milk.

196 776 784 One of the commonest uses of *thek* is, as we have seen, in reference to totems. A man respects his totem by refraining from harming it in any way (pp. 64 seq.). The respect is mutual and the totem should refrain from harming those who respect it. We have also noted earlier (p. 129) the respect relationship between twins and birds. The word is also used for the attitude of a man towards his fetish.

196 784 *Thek* has, therefore, in all its contexts of usage a sense of deference, constraint, modesty or shyness, or a mixture of these attitudes. It seems often to carry as part of its load of meaning a feeling of embarrassment which is entirely lacking in the ordinary behaviour of Nuer towards persons and nature. The behaviour associated with it is formalistic and includes always avoidance and abstention, though it will have been observed that these need not be absolute. A man does not in any way avoid his cows except with regard to (*ke kwi*) milking them.[1]

The purpose and function of these respect relationships are

observes or honours (*kuth*) the days of her indisposition. On the other hand, *thek* may be used to speak of a woman being in her periods, it being understood that what she respects are the cattle. The word can thus be used as a polite euphemism for 'to menstruate'.

[1] While a man does not respect a cow dedicated to a spirit, Dr. Smith tells me that he can be said to respect it with regard to milk and marriage. Only members of his family may drink its milk and it must not be used for marriage, unless in either case the spirit gives its consent. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that a man can also be said to respect such a cow with regard to urine, in that he does not use it for domestic purposes. As I was not aware of these particular usages of the word *thek* I can only record this information without discussing it. A breach of the prohibitions would certainly involve liability (pp. 39-40) but it would not be classed as moral.

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evident. They are intended to keep people apart from other people or from creatures or things, either altogether or in certain circumstances or with regard to certain matters, and this is what they achieve. Some of them have important secondary functions in the regulation of the social order—for example, those which determine behaviour between affines and between parties to feuds; but we need not now inquire why they concern certain persons, things, and situations and not others, nor what these persons, things, and situations have in common. We are concerned only with the fact that a violation of the prohibition is to a greater or lesser degree a fault which in many cases brings disaster to the transgressor.

Failure to show respect when there is a *thek* relationship is more than a breach of decorum. It entails to a greater or lesser extent religious sanctions. It is true that in some cases, as, for example, to be seen naked by a mother-in-law, the breach is chiefly regarded as one of good manners which, since the offence was at the worst one of negligence, can be made up for by presenting the offended person with some small gift. But even here a religious sanction is not entirely lacking, because it is believed that failure to respect the parents-in-law may injure the children, and this would ultimately be attributed to God. Nuer say that were a man's nakedness to be seen often by his wife's parents his children might go blind. However, it is not the sight of the genitals in itself which is thought to cause injury so much as the disrespect in not observing the convention. That this is so may be seen from the fact that though Nuer near the American mission at Nasser, Dr. Mary Smith tells me, now often wear shorts, they continue to wear as well and over them when they visit their parents-in-law the wild cat's fur traditionally worn on such occasions. We may surmise that the convention is felt by Nuer to have also a moral significance from the violent indignation I have witnessed in female relatives of wives at exposure by husbands in their presence although they were not their mothers-in-law and the exposures were entirely accidental. The violence of their complaints would have been out of proportion to the offence were it merely a matter of etiquette. To see inadvertently an unrelated person of the opposite sex eat, or accidentally to be seen eating by the same, is perhaps the lack of respect nearest to a simple, though serious, breach of manners, but Nuer nevertheless give the impression of believing that some misfortune may follow from it.

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196 784 Nuer speak of these conventions with regard to nakedness and eating as *thesk ma tot*, minor respect. That they do not think of them as faults of the same order as breaches of the other rules of respect—*thesk ma dit*, major respect—is also shown by the fact that though all the rules are alike referred to as *thek* they do not speak of a breach of either the nakedness or the food convention as *nueer*,[1] the word, the verbal form of which is *nuer*, which they use when speaking of breaches of some of the other rules and the consequences of them. We have earlier met the word in reference to eating human flesh (p. 19) and to drinking from a pool contaminated by a corpse (p. 130). A breach of the more serious rules of *thek* is likely to cause death to the breakers or their children or cattle, especially if the breach was wilful. I was told that *nueer* is [753] a sickness of the whole body which generally begins with violent vomiting, but probably any serious sickness following the breach of a *thek* taboo would be described as *nueer*. Sometimes the offender's life can be saved by timely action, and his recovery is thought to be likely if his offence was unintentional. Sacrifice is made to God and in certain circumstances an infusion of cleansing medicines may also be drunk.

196 784 577 262 The attitude Nuer call *thek* is thus different from mere avoidance of doing things considered to be unbecoming. Failure to conform to *thek* prohibitions involves the culprit in something more than *puc*, shame, and its counterpart *cony*, a word which has the general sense of 'to despise'. Any conspicuous breach of morality or decorum is shameful in Nuer eyes, as when a man steals or is rude to his father. It is shameful—to give another example—for a man, especially if he is unmarried and is courting girls, to eat birds or eggs. Only a *bar*, a poor man without cattle, would eat them. I was frequently taunted by Nuer on this score: 'are you not a man that you eat such little things?' Nuer also regard the eating of most wild fruits as contemptible and they think it both disgusting and shameful to eat carnivora, monkeys, zebras, most reptiles, and all insects. The breach of a *thek* rule may be shameful and despicable, but when it is spoken of as *nueer* 196 it is also sinful.

784 783 There are, as will be seen, prohibitions with religious sanctions

[1] It should perhaps be made clear that the word *nueer* has nothing to do with 'Nuer', the name of the people. 'Nuer' is not the name by which the people refer to themselves but is what foreigners call them.

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which do not form part of respect relationships and are, therefore, not called *thek*, but *thek* is the most important Nuer category of interdiction. An infringement of the other prohibitions is not usually spoken of as *nueer*, though Nuer nevertheless say that all such infringements are like *nueer*, which is a standard by which they judge, and to which they tend to assimilate any serious breach of an interdiction with religious sanctions. Before discussing these we may, therefore, note that the most prominent feature of the worst forms of sin is that it kills; and it is significant that the word *nueer* means in Dinka 'to destroy' and 'to kill',[1] a sense it also often has in Nuer when the consequences of sin are being referred to.

Except in the case of a breach of the weaning interdiction, which is discussed further later, and in that of a rare breach of the milking interdiction, the transgressions so far mentioned are unwitting offences. It must be rare indeed that anyone transgresses in these ways knowingly and deliberately. The transgressions we shall now consider are generally deliberate actions.

If *nueer* is the most important of Nuer sin concepts the one most frequently spoken of is *rual*, incest, which Nuer say is '*cere ke nueer*', 'like *nueer*', and they may use the verbal form *nuer* when speaking of its consequences, for example, '*ce nyiman nuer*', 'he brought death to his sister' (by having congress with her). It should be noted that Nuer say this, and also that they sometimes liken both *nueer* and *rual* to *biit*,[2] a curse and a prohibition of which a conditional curse is sanction, because their doing so shows that though there are different words for different sorts of fault they are also thought to have something in common. They all destroy and they are all also, in one way of thinking of them, conceived of as pursuing, or tracking, the transgressor to disaster.

I have given elsewhere[3] a fairly lengthy account of Nuer prohibitions on intermarriage and on extra-marital congress, so the subject may be treated briefly here and with reference only to such features of it as are relevant to a discussion of religion. Nuer

[1] P. A. Nebel, *Dinka Dictionary*, 1936, p. 119.

[2] Indeed in some cases it is not easy to say whether an act should be described as *nueer* or as a sort of *biit*, e.g. a girl drinking the milk of her bridewealth cattle or an eldest son using his parents' spoon.

[3] 'Nuer Rules of Exogamy and Incest', *Social Structure*, edited by Meyer Fortes, 1949; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer*, 1951, chap. ii.

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783 they tend to take the view that it is scarcely for them to censure a man whose desires have got the better of him. When there is adultery, the husband may be indignant and demand compensation for the injury done to him, but Nuer do not become indignant at the idea of adultery. The essential point is that such faults as we are considering are, wholly or in part, conceived of as offences against God, and Nuer think that it is he who punishes them. It is God's *cuong*, right, rather than, or as well as, man's, that has been violated. The man who commits them, therefore, places himself, and possibly others too, in danger by having done something which brings Spirit into action in the affairs of men.

783 196 This danger is a condition which to some extent appears to be regarded as physical, the threatening misfortune, usually sickness, which results and is the outward manifestation of the sin being already in the man before it manifests itself. He is contaminated by his act. This is why medicines, aspersions, fumigations, and other modes of expulsion and cleansing are used in addition to the atoning act of sacrifice. This is more than mimicry. The pollution is substantival. That the sin is felt to be attached to the man is further expressed by two words of great significance, *dop* and *woc*. *Dop* means to catch alight, the spreading of a flame or fire. It is also used to describe a man catching a disease, yaws for example, from another and the spreading of an epidemic or murrain, such [759] as smallpox or rinderpest (Nuer are aware that such diseases are spread by contact); and it can likewise refer to anything spreading, as a fight developing out of a quarrel and people other than the principals becoming involved in it. The general idea is that of a person catching something from another, an infection, whether it be a disease, a quarrel, or a bad habit. In our present context the word means that the uncleanness which results from sins may pass to others closely related to those who are directly concerned in them. They also are in danger. *Woc* is used in a number of contexts in which the sense is getting rid of something, especially by wiping it out. It is the ritual ones which more particularly concern us. The first cut across the forehead at initiation is called the *woc dhol*, the wiping out of boyhood. The final rites of marriage are said to wipe out maidenhood. As we have noted, the mortuary ceremony is called *col woc*, the wiping out of death and mourning with their association of debt. The word is also used in reference to sacrifices made on account of a transgression. Sacrifice is

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said to woc, wipe out, *nuaer*, *ruai*, *kor*, and *thiang*, and indeed any *duer*, fault. The transgressor is healed by the blotting out of his transgression. God turns away, as the Nuer put it. He does not regard it any more, so it ceases to be. When used in reference to sacrifices made on account of sins the word has thus the sense of expiation, and it is interesting that the same word which Nuer use for wiping out a transgression means in Dinka 'to err', 'to sin', and 'offence'.[1] We have in the words *dop* and woc two ideas which throw much light on the way Nuer regard sins and sacrifices made in consequence of them. Sin, as has been noted, is something which destroys and which tracks down. Two other characteristics of it are now revealed. It can spread and it can be wiped out by sacrifice. But though sin is regarded as bringing about a condition of the person which is contagious, the uncleanness is not simply a physical impurity which can be washed or purged away. It is also a spiritual state which can only be changed by sacrifice; and not even sacrifice is sufficient by itself to change it, only sacrifice which carries with it the will and desire of the sinner. What gives emphasis to the physical quality of the condition is the fact that the consequences of sin, which in a sense form part of it, are physical. This brings us to a very important matter, the identification of disease with sin.

Nuer may speak, as we have seen, of the consequences of a sin by the same word (in which the interdiction is also implied) as they use when they speak of the sin itself. *Ruai* is incest, and it is also syphilis and yaws. *Nuaer* is a breach of certain interdictions, and it is also the violent sickness which follows the breach. *Thiang* is a breach of the weaning interdiction, and it is also the dysentery the breach causes. Different diseases have different names, it is true, but if the sin which brought the sickness about is known it is spoken of by the name of the sin. The particular form of the sickness, the particular consequences which have resulted from the sin, are of secondary interest. Had the man suffered from a different ailment it would have been from the same cause. Therefore one may say that where there is a state of sin such sickness as it appears in is a symptom of the sin, or even in a sense is the sin. Even where there has been no breach of a specific interdiction, and there is consequently not the same verbal identification, any sickness tends to be regarded as the operation of Spirit on account

[1] J. C. Mönnenmann, *Die Dinka-Sprache*, 1886, p. 303; Trudinger, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

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782 mean that the intention is implied in the sacrifice itself in the circumstances in which it is made. However, even in the most perfunctory rites, it is more usual for a few formal phrases to be spoken by the officiant as he consecrates the victim, either in a scarcely audible patter or even silently. He is addressing God and not the people present. This is what Nuer call a *lam me tot*, a short invocation. They say *'ca he lam e bec'*, 'they will not invoke (God) much'. Normally, however, and always in a serious situation which also permits leisurely action, there is a *lam me dit*, a long invocation. The officiant walks up and down past the tethered beast, brandishing his spear, and uttering his words loud and clear —he is then addressing the audience as well as God, and they may interrupt him with promptings, advice, and even argument. In a long address of this kind certain petitionary formulae recur again and again but it has no set form or prescribed words. Each speaker may say what he likes so long as what he says is true and also in some way relevant to the intention of the sacrifice. These long rambling addresses, sometimes taking over an hour to deliver, contain, besides a statement of intention and petitions, all sorts of affirmations, exhortations, reflections about life, anecdotes, and opinions; and also complaints, for on very formal occasions the speaker must reveal any grievance he may have in *ain* heart. As there may be several such invocations by different persons before the victim is slain, a sacrifice may be a very lengthy affair, and for a European rather tedious to assist at. He has to sit in the sun for several hours listening to addresses which are difficult for him to follow. Some of the sentences may be inaudible, the speaker speaking too low or having his back turned to the audience, who may also be talking among themselves; and the invocations are apt to require a more detailed knowledge of past events and relationships than a stranger is likely to have. These difficulties are added to by a marked tendency in the invocations towards periphrasis and aposiopesis.

782 The word *lam*, which has much the same range of meaning in
796 other Nilotic languages, expresses a number of interconnected ideas, one or other of which is stressed according to the direction of interest. In reference to God it has to be translated 'to invoke'. In reference to a sacrificial victim it can be translated 'to sacrifice'. With reference to a man the ordinary meaning is 'to curse', more rarely 'to bless'. It may also refer to a formal pronouncement in

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ordeals, and in animal stories to the ordeal itself. 'Invocation' would seem best to cover all these special senses. For the verbal form I shall generally use the phrase 'to make an invocation'. Nuer usually employ it in what we call a passive or intransitive mood when speaking of sacrifices, saying *'ba lam'*, 'an invocation is made', or *'he lam ke lam'*, 'he will invocate with an invocation'; but since it is understood that it is God (though it may be in some refraction and sometimes coupled with ghosts) who is invoked it is legitimate also to use the phrase 'to invoke God' even when this is not a word-for-word translation of what is said in Nuer.[1] Even in curses and blessings it is God who is implicitly, if not explicitly, invoked, since the desired action can come only from him. A curse is therefore an imprecatory, and a blessing a benedictory, address to God.

The full significance of the *lam* will emerge later when the symbolism of the spear and the role of the ox have been discussed. Here I define only its outward character as a ritual form of speech. The word indicates a distinctive form of address rather than its content, which varies according to circumstances. We can perhaps best grasp its distinctive character by contrasting invocation (*lam*) with prayer (*pal*). *Pal* is to make a simple and direct petition to God for some favour, usually of a general nature, such as the petitions I recorded in Chapter I; and the supplication is so often spoken with a pleading of the hands that the word implies this gesture—*be tet pal*, praying with the hands, being understood. The word may also be used to refer to congregational hymn-singing to spirits, though since this is frequently done to the accompaniment of hand-clapping the word *pat*, to clap, is often used instead. The form and character of the *lam* are different. Its characteristic accompanying gesture is brandishing a spear, and although it contains petitions (*lang kwoth*) which are the same as those uttered in praying these are not its main or typical feature. The invocation has an incisiveness prayer lacks. What is said in it is more definite and particular; and its clauses are mostly affirmations, formal statements, rather than petitions, and these affirmations, declarations of what is, have a sort of virtue in themselves.

[1] The difficulty is that the verb 'invoke', unlike the now rarely used 'invocate', cannot be used intransitively in English as the verb *lam* can be used in Nuer. However, the grammatical distinctions we make between transitive and intransitive and between passive and active do not entirely suit the Nuer language.

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I do no mean by this that an invocation is a spell—far from it— but there is a difference between an assertion and a supplication. Thus in a sacrifice for sickness what is said is not so much may the sick man be healed as that his sickness is of no account and that he will be healed in the moment of sacrifice. Intention and what is intended are brought together. The sickness is finished, it is blown away, it is no more. And here we have again to emphasize the significance of the identification of sickness with sin. If the sacrifice wipes out the sin it wipes out also the material form in which it is manifested and known. That this emphasis is required is confirmed by a letter I have received from Dr. Mary Smith in which she tells me that the Nuer at her mission do not use the word *lam* if they are speaking of praising or giving thanks but only, and always, where sin is involved. But the validity of the assertion that the evil is no more depends on the general validity of all else that is said. Nuer say that a man must make invocation in truth (*thuogh*). Even in recounting the most trivial details in a history of events which have led up to a situation in which sacrifice is necessary every statement made in the presence of God must be true; and I think this, rather than just a desire to interrupt or dispute, accounts for the emendations, additions, and contradictions of the assistants. The victim offered to God has placed on its back by the *lam* what is said in the *lam*, and if the sacrifice is to be efficacious what is said must be true.

Now takes place the immolation, what Nuer generally call the *kam yang*, the giving, or offering, of the victim when speaking of personal sacrifices, and the *nak*, the killing, when speaking of collective sacrifices. By the use of one or the other word they indicate whether a sacrifice is for them more a religious or a festal event, whether its purpose is mainly piacular or social. Nuer do not, in so far as I have observed or heard, wait for the animal to urinate before killing it, as do some of the other Nilotic peoples. An ox is speared on the right side, and so expert are the Nuer that I have never known a second thrust to be necessary or the beast to move for more than a few seconds after the thrust has been made. Sheep and goats have their throats cut (Plate X). A bovine victim should fall well to make a perfect sacrifice. Falling well means falling cleanly on its side, preferably on its right side, and with its head in the desired direction, which in most sacrifices is towards the huts and the people who sit outside them. I have been told that

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is at fault if it does not fulfil its part of the bargain. A costly sacrifice having been made, *cuong*, right or justice, is on the human side in the matter. Thus the man of whom I was speaking above said during his harangue that after all the sacrifices he had made to the spirit *deng* on account of sickness in his family, his little daughter had been bitten by a snake and died. He had given all these oxen to *deng* and look what had happened! He felt aggrieved and had consulted a prophet of *deng* who had told him that if the spirit had taken his daughter it would compensate him for his loss; and it had indeed done so by giving him twins: *'ca col e kwoth ke cuek'*, 'it [the death of the daughter] was compensated by the spirit with twins'. The use of the word *col*, as will be seen later, here implies that the spirit was in debt to the man. This Nuer Job complained that the spirit had only compensated him because he told it that he had had enough of it and that it could take all his children if it pleased, for then he would have finished with it because it would have nothing more to take from him.

The word *kok* occurs in the other Nilotic languages with much the same range of meaning, outside its sacrificial usage, as it has today in Nuer, for one most frequently hears it used today to describe the purchasing of goods from an Arab merchant. That a word which had chiefly, and perhaps primarily, a sacrificial meaning should come to be employed for the recent practice of buying something from a shop, a commercial sense it has also in other Nilotic tongues, sheds some light not only on Nuer ideas about trading but also on their ideas about sacrifice. Since the present range of meaning of the word includes buying and selling one might say that God or a spirit is 'bought' by sacrifice. The dangers of translation that beset one at every step in an attempt to understand and make intelligible Nuer religious ideas are here very apparent, for once we use the word 'bought' the associations it has among ourselves rush in to colour the Nuer conception. But Nuer do not regard purchase from an Arab merchant in the way in which we regard purchase from a shop. It is not to them an impersonal transaction, and they have no idea of price and currency in our sense. Their idea of a purchase is that you give something to a merchant who is thereby put under an obligation to help you. At the same time you ask him for something you need from his shop and he ought to give it to you because, by taking your gift, he has entered into a reciprocal relationship with

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782 437 196 you. Hence *kok* has the sense of either 'to buy' or 'to sell'. The two acts are an expression of a single relationship of reciprocity. As an Arab merchant regards the transaction rather differently misunderstandings arise. In the Nuer way of looking at the matter what is involved in an exchange of this kind is a relation between persons rather than between things. It is the merchant who is 'bought' rather than the goods, just as it is God or a spirit who is bounden by sacrifice; or it can be better put by saying that the partners, Nuer and merchant, man and God, *kok* each other. The general notion conveyed by the word is therefore that of exchange. This sense covers, as do our own words 'ransom' and 'redemption', both religious and commercial usages. In both there is the idea of a relationship expressed in gift and counter-gift. The mere fact that the word has been made use of to denote what we regard as plain and simple commerce shows that some idea of a bargain is implied in its sacrificial use. Whatever else it may also be, sacrifice can be regarded, as Socrates says in the *Euthyphro*, as being in a sense a 'commercial technique', a way of doing business between gods and men. A bargain is struck. There is an exchange. This is further shown by the use of the verb *luel*, not in reference to any particular kind or situation of sacrifice but in invocations at personal sacrifices. A consideration of its use shows us better what sort of exchange Nuer sacrifice is.

782 758 One of Professor Westermann's texts records a sacrificial invocation made on behalf of a sick man. I would translate it as follows: 'God, what is this? Leave him with us; let him recover. Turn about, take thy cow. It has been decreed for the life. It is thou who hast spoken thus. Take the cow that it may be in exchange for the life (*bi je luele yei*). It is thou who hast created us; it is the cow which is exchanged for life (*e bi yang a luel ne yei*). Take the goat and the cucumber; and let him recover! In what have we erred? Give us the life. Thou art our father. Why must we always suffer? Give us the life, we pray thee, our father.'[1]

437 196 In other contexts the word *luel* means 'to exchange' or 'to change'. Something takes the place of another thing equal to it —a simple exchange of two things considered to be of more or less

[1] Op. cit., pp. 116–17. The sentence 'Take the goat and the cucumber' would not occur in any actual invocation, for the two things would not be sacrificed at the same time. Whoever spoke the text has inserted a gloss in the sense of 'Take the cow [*ee*], that is to say, the goat or the cucumber' [as the case may be].

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equal value by the persons concerned in the exchange, as when a man who is leaving his neighbourhood exchanges his old byre for a bull calf or when a man exchanges an ox with certain markings desired by his partner to the exchange for one with his own favourite markings. The difference between *kok* and *luel* is that between the reciprocal relation between persons in an exchange and equivalence of objects exchanged. In either case the action is immediate, unlike that implied by use of the words *ngual*, to borrow, and *gwal*, to lend. In loans a man makes a gift and the recipient later returns it or something of greater value. There are two distinct and separate movements between which there is a long passage of time. In its piacular context, therefore, the word *luel* means that the life of the victim is exchanged in the moment of its immolation for the life of a man. In the sacrificial situation the two things are of equal value, so that the one can be substituted for the other. This puts men and cattle in a very peculiar relationship to each other, a matter I discuss in Chapter X.

In personal and piacular sacrifices the animals are substitutions for men. To this extent sacrifice is an exchange, but it is also something very much more than just a simple exchange. It is not a simple idea at all but a very complex one in which many other elements are present. I discuss the problem in more general terms later, but we may here note how other terms are used to describe personal sacrifices which emphasize rather the related ideas of propitiation, expiation, atonement, and purification.

Sometimes the word *lor* is used to describe a sacrifice. The word means 'to go to meet', perhaps its most common usage being to describe the formal greeting that Nuer, especially women, make to a visitor of importance when they go from their homes to receive him outside their homestead or village. The word has therefore the further sense of 'to honour', as would appear to be the case also in Dinka and other Nilotic tongues. But in the religious sense of the word people go out of their villages to meet a plague or other danger not with the purpose of bringing it to their homes to give it hospitality there but with the opposite purpose of preventing it from entering their homes. They go out to meet and stay a plague or murrain with sacrifice. They say '*kene je lor*', 'let us go out to meet it'. The well-known prophet Ngundeng of the Leu tribe did this in times of epidemics, sometimes, I was told, sacrificing dozens of oxen and leaving their carcasses in

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On the day when, by the cutting of lines on his forehead, a boy

881 becomes a man there is much rejoicing of his kinsfolk, and especially of his father and paternal kin. In talking to Nuer about this day they have impressed on me that what is uppermost in the minds of the elder men, particularly at the initiation of an eldest son, is that the continuity of the family and lineage is now assured. Initiation is the threshold to marriage and the birth of sons who will remember their forebears; for as soon as the period of healing and seclusion is over the initiates embark on a full sex life leading to courtship, marriage, and begetting. An initiate is part of a lineage and clan and his initiation is seen in terms of its collective life. His new relationship with the cattle is then not only a personal one, important though that is, but the personal relationship is incorporated in a more general lineage one.

231 613 614 Nuer conceive of the ancestor of a clan, and likewise the ancestors of its component lineages, as having possessed a herd, the descendants of which have had, and continue to have, though distributed among different families, a constant relationship with the descendants of their original owners and are still thought of as one herd. This ancestral herd is a fiction, for the cattle are being constantly dispersed and replaced by others at marriages, but conceptually it is an enduring collectivity. There is ideally a constant attachment, the clan and its herd forming a joint community down the generations, so much so that a common, perhaps the commonest, explanation of a division in the clan is the fighting of bulls of the ancestors of the divided parts. The social cleavage is represented in tradition as a cleavage in the herd.

231 613 614 583 196 The unity of clans and lineages is symbolized in the names of the ancestral spears, which we have already discussed,[1] and in honorific titles, chiefly derived from the names of cows. In both cases we are dealing with ideas and not actual things, with the idea of a clan spear handed down as an heirloom and with the idea of the present herds of the members of a clan being descended from the ancestral herd. Nuer say that *'mut kene paak jalke kel'*, 'the spear and the honorific title go together'. If a man has a certain clan spear he must have one or more honorific titles which go with it. Both have come down together from *tuok nath*, the beginnings of the Nuer. The *paak*, a word found with the same meaning in some of the other Nilotic languages, may be described as an honorific title used as a mode of salutation or address. It is commonly used on ceremonial occasions such as on formal visits, at dances,

[1] [See p. 240-47, Ch. 11] (238) Analysis

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and at marriage and initiation ceremonies. Otherwise it is mostly a complimentary usage which expresses a formal relationship of reserve, as between a husband's mother and her son's wife, and then it is chiefly a woman's mode of address.

The title consists of *gat*, son (of), or *nya*, daughter (of), followed by a word which usually refers to a cow said to be that on whose milk the ancestor of the clan or lineage was nurtured in infancy, though it may refer to the place where the clan or lineage is said to have originated, or to some object connected with its ancestor, or to its totem. Nuer say that clans either '*ba paak ka kwi yangdiew*', 'are saluted by reference to their cow' or '*ba paak ka kwi ciengdiew*', 'are saluted by reference to their (original) village site', but since the salutation generally refers to a cow the expressions '*paak*', 'honorific salutation', and '*paakene yang*', 'honorific salutation of cow', are synonyms. The words are often exceedingly difficult to translate, or even to discover the meaning of, especially when they relate to cows, for here the Nuer language proliferates symbolism in luxuriant elaborations of fancy; and representations of ancestral cow, ancestral home, totem, and totemic spirit, are sometimes fused in the titles, which are built out of a number of residues all of which derive from and express lineage values. I have listed and discussed some of these honorific titles elsewhere,[1] and there is no need here for a detailed consideration of them. We have only to note the central place the idea of a cow has in them, the cow standing for the herd and hence also for the lineage of its masters.

It need not surprise us that it is a cow that is referred to and not an ox or bull. It would be inappropriate to refer to an ox since, as I understand the matter, the whole point of using a symbol from the herds is to express in a single representation the idea of the unity of a lineage and its cattle, the cattle which sustain the lineage by their milk (the cow suckles the ancestor) and by constant calving provide them with bridewealth for marriages whereby sons are born and the lineage continued, and with a means of maintaining communication with Spirit and ghosts. Male animals do not answer the requirements of the symbolism. The great majority of the bulls are castrated, and, if not later disposed of in marriage, those which survive murrains are sacrificed; and the animals which are left entire are not thought of as being, like the

[1] 'The Nuer: Tribe and Clan', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1934, pp. 23-94.

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male members of a human lineage, a line of descent. In tracing back the lineage of a beast, which Nuer can sometimes do to several generations, they do so by the points of the dams and not the points of the sires: an ox of certain markings was born of a cow of certain markings and it of a cow of other markings. Descent in the herd is, so to speak, traced matrilineally; and it is the cows which are seen as the stable element, which calve cow-calves, which calve cow-calves in their turn, and so provide the constant and continuous nexus between herd and lineage. Consequently, if at marriage most of a herd is dispersed and only a core is retained, it is some cows which are kept so that the herd may be built up anew through them. Therefore, it is to the cows of the ancestors, and not to their bulls, that the honorific titles of clans and lineages refer.

The lineage-herd equation can thus be considered as a collective expression of the man-ox equation. The one does not derive from the other but they are parts of a single complex representation, which finds its most logical expression in the rites of sacrifice. The name of the ox of the speaker may be shouted out in sacrificial invocations because its name stands for his own, but when the sacrifice is on behalf of a whole clan the exordial words are the spear-name of the clan, which goes together with the cow-title of the clan, representing the relation of the clan to its ancestral herd. The two symbols, ox-name and spear-name, represent two aspects of the sacrificial relationship between men and cattle, the personal and the collective. The one or other aspect is emphasized according to the nature of the sacrifice.

III

The facts we have examined, taken severally or together, point to the conclusion that there is the idea of equivalence between men and cattle, and the only plane on which there is anything that can be called equivalence is that on which men and cattle are things of the same order, so that one can be substituted for the other, namely in sacrifice, or in other words in relation to God. We have seen that in those sacrifices which have the most significance for the study of Nuer religion, the personal ones, the lives of oxen are substituted for the lives of men. This is not only evident in what